FICTION, EXOTIC AND NATIVE, FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

FEASTS AND FIGHTS OF "SMALL SOULS"

Cautious Lives of the van Lowes Recorded by a Dutch Sensitivist.

NOVEL ON OLLENDORF PLAN

Louis Couperus's story of "Small Souls," translated from the Dutch by Alexander Teixeira De Mattos (Dodd, Mead and Company), cannot be called thrilling. It is true, of course, that souls which are small should not be expected to furnish extravagant manifestations.

Dorine van Lowe called to see her brother. She carried her wet umbrella. Other things that she carried are mentioned. On her way upstairs she used her pocket handkerchief. Her brother Karel was sleek and pink and calm. He dyed his mustache. Noticing her umbrella he asked her to put it outside in the passage. "It's so wet," he said. She put it outside. Not that the members of the Van Lowe family were particularly amiable or disposed to be nice to one another. On the contrary, it was their habit to be at odds. They felt antipathies among themselves. They were watchful, cautious, not affectionate. "Dorine, please, would you mind leaving the paperweight alone?" Dorine was of a nervous habit. She had been fiddling with the paperweight. It is not indicated that she was obstinate or perverse. She seems to have refrained from her thoughtless fingering of the paperweight at her brother's request. Karel asked her to stay to dinner. He put it in this way when the gong sounded: "I suppose you won't stay, Dorine? I don't think there's much; Cateau and I always dine so simply." Dorine did not stay. She went back to her boarding house. Really it was a very good dinner to which Karel and his wife, Cateau, sat down. Queer name, Cateau. Karel's wife was 40. She was a heavy woman with round eyes. Her face too was round. They had no children.

Yes, a good dinner. If the reader wishes for proof here is a brief passage. With the conscientious realism that marks all the story it is related: "They both feasted daily. And at their meals they would exchange a glance of intelligence, as though relishing some voluptuous moment of mutual gratification because everything was so good. Softly smacking their lips they drank a good glass of good red wine. And then at dessert Karel's face beamed fiery red and Cateau blinked her eyes as though tickled to her marrow. Then they went into the sitting room and sat down at the round table with their hands folded in their laps to digest in silence. Karel, for appearance's sake, would undo the parcel from the circulating library. Now and again they looked at each other, reflecting complacently that Anna had cooked that dinner beautifully. But as they considered that this enjoyment was sinful and, above all, un-Dutch, they never spoke of their enjoyment and enjoyed in silence. This evening they reckoned out that they had quite an hour left in which to digest their dinner by the big stove." They were not eager to go to the family gathering at the house of old Mrs. van Lowe, Karel's mother. It was so pleasant to sit quietly and digest. This is all in the first chapter. In the other chapters we have other characters and scenes.

It is hard to pick out salient things in this story. Perhaps we should have said that Dorine when she tripped across puddles wore goloshes, that her long fur cloak was old fashioned, that she talked to herself, that she had no hips, that her mud colored hair was done in a knot at the back, that her age was 35. Constance, another daughter of the family, was different; she must have been, she was under a cloud owing to matrimonial irregularities. There is a scene in which the men get red in the face and bluster on account of Constance, and there is a chapter in which Constance replies to one of her sisters, Adolphine, a nagging, patronizing, particularly offensive member of the family, very cutting.y. This may be called a rather notable part of the story, for the dialogue as a rule is calm, quite unexciting.

Shall we listen for a moment to Paul and Adolphine conversing? They were quite plain and natural: do not appear to have been striving for brilliant effects. Paul begins: 'Adolphine, that velvet on the collar of Saetzema's coat." "Yes?" "That's good velvet." "Yes, they're his new dress clothes from Teulissen's." "And that satin of Floortje's dress." "Yes?" "That's good satin." "Oh, what do you know about satin?" "Every one's saying so." "Really?" "Yes, I heard them saying so all over the room." "Not really?" "Yes, as I moved about among the people I heard it whispered on every side, like a rumor: 'Have you noticed the satin of Floortje's dress? I say, did you notice the satin of Floortje's dress?'" Was this Paul an honest fellow, or was he a satirist shooting his little pointed arrows? We shall not tell. Whichever he was, there is the dialogue to which he contributed, and there is a good deal more like it.

Let it not be thought that we have picked out an uncharacteristic passage. Let the reader look at page 296 and the three following pages. Here is a single inch of text from page 298. Each quoted remark makes a paragraph. Society at The Hague is conversing. It is to be read: 'She wants to go to court.' "No, it's he who wants to go to court." "Yes, they both want to go to court." "She wants to go to court." "She wants to go to court." "She wants to go to court." (Three times.) "But what a piece of impudence!" This is Ollendorfian, but undoubtedly it is also realistic. It might be the work of a stenographer, and it has the ring of truth.

At the very last, at the painful culmination of the story, we find the Ollendorfian method still employed. Two of the men quarrel. One of them would have struck the other if he had not been prevented. They were full of wrath. They quivered with rage. Their cheeks were scarlet. Van Naghel called Van der Welcke a puppy. The ladies suffered great distress. "Bertha burst into hysterics, uttered scream after scream. Constance almost fainted." Constance cried: 'My God! Henri! Henri! What have you done!'" She cried this repeatedly. Her little boy came up. He said: "Mamma!" His name was Addie. She cried: "Addie! Addie! My boy! My God! What has papa done!" He had done nothing more than we have seen. The agitation among the ladies spread. "Mamma Van Lowe dropped into a chair sobbing." Two old aunts were sitting in the second drawing room. They were Auntie Tine and Auntie Rine. When they saw how matters were going they broke out into an Ollendorfian dialogue. Being rather deaf, they screamed at each other. "It's Constance!" "Who?" "Constance!" "Constance?" "Yes, Constance!" "Constance?" "Yes, Constance!" Presently Constance fainted, and such is the conclusion of the story. The little boy Addie contributed a final word. "It's all about nothing," he said.

It seems to us that we remember hearing in years far back that the author of this novel belonged to a school whose practitioners were called "Sensitivists." They grasped and bravely set down the little, the attenuated things.

A CONQUEROR WHEN HE WAS A COBBLER'S APPRENTICE

The second book of Martin Andersen Nexo's story of "Pelle the Conqueror," translated from the Danish by Bernard Miall (Henry Holt and Company), transfers Pelle from the farm to the town, and relates his experiences as the apprentice of a shoemaker. On his entrance into the respectable calling of the cobblers the boy was "initiated" or "hazed" by his fellows in the shop. The description is not quite clear in its offer to explain the cruel pleasantry called the "ordeal by wax," but it will be understood by the reader that a waxed end weighted and drawn taut by a heavy pair of lasts attached at one extremity was run rapidly across Pelle's neck and that it took the skin off. As he suffered he was mocked by the seasoned cobblers in language that was far from delicate. Old Jeppe especially made comments that were even more vulgar than they were stinging.

The story has no plot, does not proceed cumulatively and importantly to any particular end. Like some other voluminous novels of the time (there are to be still two other books about Pelle), it unfolds itself in a series of pictures which, having abruptly and unrelatedly arisen, vanish and are of consequence no more. Pelle does indeed meet old acquaintances now and then. Out walking with little Nikas, the journeyman, after passing the crazy watchmaker, who stood on his steps swinging with slow and regular motion a weight attached to a string; after passing also a funeral procession, behind which thumped Bjerregrav, the lame tailor, who walked with a crutch and who made it his business to attend all funerals, Pelle saw an enormously fat woman who was out in the street in her nightcap and petticoat, and he said to Nikas: "That's the Sow! She's a dreadful woman; up at Stone Farm——" but Nikas fetched Pelle a box on the ear, thereby stopping his confidences abruptly, for the journeyman held that apprentices should not talk. The story, however, lets us see the Sow again; convinces us too that she was indeed a dreadful woman, though she was quite good natured.

Pelle starts to learn how to chew tobacco, with dire results. He plays in the neighboring garden with old Skipper Ellieby's daughters, particularly with Manna, who was very pretty and almost as bold as a boy. Matters at the last went pretty far between Manna and Pelle, but she avoided the shoemaker's apprentice when her young eyes were suddenly opened; she went away to Belgium to live, and the story knows her no more. We need not speak of the butcher and the baker and a number of others. They were interesting, but there are good reasons why we should pass them by. The giant man called "The Great Power" comes into the story. He was a stonecutter and he was mad. He had suffered wrongs; he felt the pinch of poverty; he drank. In the great dry basin down at the harbor he kept 200 men away from their work and at bay. He had dynamite cartridges at hand. He smote the rock with a sledge hammer, a new and terrible Moses, for his blows meant an inundation and a tragedy. The 200 men could not divert him, could not capture him, but in the nick of time his little old mother went down and led him out by the ear, scolding him with shrill vehemence the while, as exasperated mothers know how. A little later this giant in a lucid interval saved several of his fellows from a blast of dynamite and incidentally was himself blown to smithereens. So of course he passes from the story, as we have said many of the characters do.

Of Pelle's days of idleness and poverty, of the kindness shown to him by the dancing woman whose shoes he had once mended, it is curious and interesting to read. In the books that are to come we are to have Pelle as "a great modern labor leader." Let us hope that he will be a worthy one, not too talkative and that he will continue to be entertaining.

SOME NEW FICTION.

For those who admire Algernon Blackwood's stories and ventures across the borderland of tangible realities a peculiar interest attaches to the new tales contained in "The Listener and Other Stories" (Donald C. Vaughan, New York). They seem to be experiments in developing horror in various indirect ways, possibly early attempts to develop the suggestion and power that mark his best work. Several are explained by the causes that are usual in the older mystery stories. Insanity, the occurrence of a similar act previously in the same place and so on. One story will attract attention as a reminder of the days when Mr. Blackwood was a newspaper reporter in New York. There is nothing supernatural in the account of the scientific murderer who pursues the reporter he dislikes; it is ingeniously exciting. The reader and newspaper men will be astonished at the drinking powers the author attributes to them. Mr. Blackwood's memory of the famous back part of the pharmacy that is no more a meeting place for night workers is rather dim, but that of the agony of reporting sermons in Brooklyn is still vivid.

The sprightly banter of an amiable young married couple and their unconventional friends, with occasional lapses into tenderness, help the readers of Cyril Harcourt's "First Cousin to a Dream" (John Lane Company) through the amusements of several resorts in Europe. The couple have appeared in earlier books by Mr. Harcourt; they do not change in this, they are affectionate, light hearted and converse only in lively repartee, which grows rather monotonous. They begin in Capri and Sorrento, where the author is properly enfhusiastic, stop at Rome, of which he approves, and then go to Switzerland, in order to ski. After they have had enough of that they try the pleasures of Monte Carlo. The behavior of the new British young person seems rather startling. Suddenly the author turns to sentiment. There are indications that the desire of the pair for a child may be gratified, so they return to England for the event, and the reader is allowed to watch the young husband's distress during the ordeal. The author is unkindly sarcastic about tourists and agencies, but his personally conducted tour differs only in the class of his tourists from those he scoffs at. He writes with a light and amusing touch, but he never changes his tone.

It may be said at once of Edmund Hamilton Sears's "The Son of the Prefect" (Richard G. Badger, Boston) that though the scene is in Rome in the reign of Tiberius, neither that capable and much abused Emperor nor Christianity plays any part in the story. We watch the proceedings of a young man of rank and are allowed to attend a Roman banquet which the author keeps within due bounds, the performance of a play by Plautus, a chariot race and a gladiatorial combat in the circus. The sturdy hero is not merely an athlete: he has an independence of mind and freedom from prejudice which seems more American than Roman, with a power for cross-examination that any American lawyer might envy. He falls in love with a Jewish maiden and she with him, the reason for this, apparently, is to allow the discussion of the several forms of religion current in Rome at the time. Their marriage is a concession to romance, for the author probably knows what difficulties would have stood in the way. We regret that he should make the Greek young woman so bad and the Roman maiden so haughty. He has tried hard and, not without success, to make the didactic portions subordinate to the story itself.

A queer mixture of extreme idealism and sordid realism is offered by Mrs. Havelock Ellis in "Love-Acre" (Mitchell Kennerley, New York), perhaps as a kind of anti-religious tract. Her hero is a solitary, misunderstood boy, who keeps close to nature and understands plants and insects and animals; he dreams of his dead mother and of a mystic land in which she lives. This is charming, though not always intelligible. He is a shepherd and falls in love with a girl who has no higher ideas than the ordinary village people. Then his troubles begin; he is set upon by a gang of Cornish louts, is wrongfully accused of drunkenness and violence and the girl leaves him. Next he marries a girl who has gone wrong, is driven out of his village, is shunned in the place he goes to as a murderer and sorcerer and is left to die alone. The doctor who attends him finds that he has acted always as Christ would and that his ostracism is the result. The idealistic portion and the pictures of the brutal Cornish villagers are equally well done. The reader may feel that the hero might have had a fair chance in life if the author had not been bound to torture him.

In "A Daughter of the Dons" (G. W. Dillingham Company) William MacLeod Raines manages to impress on his readers that a Mexican may be a gentleman and may have ideals that are fully as respectable as those of the Americans who deal with him. The American, to be sure, wins the girl; their love affair is told pleasantly, though it follows the conventions of Western romance. The man is rough and masterful and makes much trouble through his disregard of the ways of the people he has intruded upon. The little Mexican, on the contrary, is game through and through; he shows more moral courage even than physical bravery. He is a Spanish gentleman, and at last makes the American understand it. The story reads easily, but is put together rather carelessly; the author should have taken more pains with it.

In "The Ball of Fire" (Hearst's International Library Company) George Randolph Chester and Lilian Chester combine to expose the iniquity of corporations and the derelictions of the churches. A clear sighted but heedless young woman informs the vestry of an enormously rich church that it is mercenary. This rouses a company promoter to scheme for an amalgamation of all the riches in the world into a trust which he shall control and lay at her feet. The church owns some amazingly valuable slum property which he wants; also a worldly rector. In consequence we hear of the promoter's extraordinary and efficient activity, interrupted by the social dissipations of the young woman and the successive proposals of marriage to her, and relieved by occasional visits to the slums. The young woman certainly leads the promoter on; when he has nearly attained his object, however, she throws him down, ruins his plans and takes up instead with the rector, who has seen the error of his ways meanwhile and is now ready to take up settlement work with her. The reader will be impressed with the wickedness of corporations and with the reckless behavior of young women.

A very thorough and despicable villain enlivens Emma S. Allen's "Afterwards" (Edward J. Clode, New York), which opens with a railroad crash in Pennsylvania and winds up in the San Francisco earthquake. He hardly appears in the story, after making an elaborate statement of what he has done and what he intends to do, while turning from an attack of delirium tremens to a fit of epilepsy. He seems able to do what he pleases with the unlucky family on which he has fastened himself. In spite of an elaborate preparation with wholly different persons the main portion of the story has to do with the tangle in which a young woman secretly married gets into with a college professor, who is engaged, when they find out that they love each other. The reader will be prepared, therefore, for high strung emotion, tempered by long explanations, indulged in by all who come into the story, and by the curious habit many of them have of crying out their secrets so that all may overhear them.

A lively young girl manages to have a pretty good time with her young negro attendants on a Virginia plantation in Mary T. Waggaman's "The Secret of Pocomoke" (The Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind.). She is transferred to New York, where she edifies her relatives and meets with cruel treatment from a mercenary aunt. The end is rather hurried and melodramatic; if the discovery in the mountains were worth being made at all, it should have been made more of. The author's whole interest, however, is in her amiable little heroine.

A short and pathetic story of the work done by settlement workers in the Kentucky mountains, Lucy Furman's "Sight for the Blind" (Macmillans) is printed with a long introduction by Ida M. Tarbell. The object of the publication is to arouse interest in the excellent work that is being done by some devoted women for the mountaineers.

The twenty-two stories and sketches contained in "Tales of Two Countries," by Maxim Gorky (B. W. Huebsch, New York), are the result of the Russian writer's stay in Italy. The impression they leave is that Italy has softened Gorky's pessimism. He appreciates the beauty of his surroundings. Of the Italian tales a few are of Italians, tragedies of poor lives with few brutal touches; others might be of people in any place, and these have touches of the hideousness the author affects. The Russian stories are bitter but abstract satires. We imagine that those who have the Gorky taste will feel that this set of stories is weaker than his earlier ones.

HUMOR.

An album of about sixty portraits by James Montgomery Flagg is issued under the title "The Well-Knowns" by the George H. Doran Company. Some are plain portraits and some are caricatures, but nearly all are excellent likenesses. Some of the subjects are politicians, others actors, others visiting literary notables; the majority, however, is made up of the writers and illustrators who for the moment are keeping themselves before the public eye in New York. It is an interesting collection.

A fair example of current newspaper humor with pen and pencil will be found in Harry Grant Dart's "The Sprightly Adventures of Mr. Homesweet Home" (Moffat, Yard and Company.) The pictures are mildly funny, the text repeats the usual witticisms about living in flats, automobiles, camping out and so on and avoids vulgarity.

There is a strong dose of seriousness in Brian Boru Dunne's "Cured!" (The John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia). He tells of his experiences with doctors and of the seventy methods he tried to relieve him of dyspepsia. The humor consists in the exaggeration in describing the treatment, for the author takes his ailment very seriously. In his case the cure came by changing his glasses. The pictures are by Hugh Doyle.